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AUTHOR Murk, Peter J.
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ABSTRACT

Using a brief experiential group activity called "Choosing a Color Exercise" as an introductory measure, this paper explains the basics of group dynamics and reviews the major theoretical relationships between the group's structure, the dynamics of maintenance and task behaviors, and effective individual performances. The types of functional and nonfunctional barriers are reviewed and analyzed. The paper includes an analysis of the history and stages of group development and group behaviors, providing suggestions for effective group dynamic strategies and creative, facilitative leadership techniques. The final section examines small group discussion techniques and facilitative strategies for meeting management objectives in order to better motivate groups to produce more effective results. Contains 14 references. (KC)

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EFFECTIVE GROUP DYNAMICS:

THEORIES AND PRACTICES

by

Peter J. Murk, Ph.D.
Professor in Adult and Community Education,
Educational Leadership Department --Teachers College 915
Ball State University, Muncie, IN 47306

Abstract

Using a brief experiential group activity entitled "Choosing a Color Exercise" as an introductory measure, the participants will encounter the basics of group dynamics and review the major theoretical relationships between the group's structure; the dynamics of maintenance and task behaviors and effective individual performances. A thorough explanation as well as understanding of the types of functional and nonfunctional barriers will be reviewed and analyzed. An analysis of the history and stages of group development and behaviors will be presented. Important effective group dynamic strategies and creative, facilitative leadership techniques will be studied and suggested. Finally, small group discussion techniques and facilitative strategies for meeting management objectives will be examined for greater understanding in order to better motivate groups to achieve their important desired outcomes and to produce more effective results.

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Effective Group Dynamics: Theories and Practices:

Introduction

Individuals in groups and group facilitators (leaders) need to become more sensitive and responsive to the functions and dynamic needs of groups as they attempt to plan, execute, and evaluate important issues and decisions while maintaining some sense of group unity and purpose. Businesses and industries like The Ford Motor Company for example, are also concerned with productivity and efficiency and offer some helpful hints as a checklist for effective meetings, productive groups, and effective leadership:

* Are we starting on time?
* What are the desired outcomes?
* Do we have an agenda?
* Do we have enough time to accomplish everything?
* Are we as stakeholders? (Committed to task / objective)
* Is everyone participating (who should)?
* Is more than one person talking?
* Have we gotten off the subject?
* Let's recap (at the end of the meeting):
    ** What did we accomplish?
    ** What did we agree to?
    ** Where do we go from here:
        -- What, Who, When and Why?
* Are we ending on time?

(Sign in The Ford Motor Company Board Room, Connersville, IN)

Shared Leadership and Membership:

Leadership is something someone says or does within a group that helps the group to get its task (job) done by working together. What a person says or does in the group to get the group job done is often more important than who the person is, that is, the appointed or elected leader. Group leadership is often regarded as an important function, not an element of personality. Group leadership roles must be shared based on specific situations because one person cannot perform all of the many functions necessary to help the group work together effectively.

Individuals in groups, as well as the designated leader, need to become more sensitive and responsive to the functional needs of the group as it attempts to reach and execute decisions while maintaining some sense of group unity.

One of the continuing problems confronted in attempting to increase the productivity and effectiveness of the group is that of becoming aware of the relationships between the group's structure and dynamics and its task performance.

Every group operates on basically three levels:

Group Task Level: Most groups have some task facing them and exist primarily to carry out that task. Many times they are ad hoc or specially appointed committees. Frequently they are so conscious of the need to accomplish the task that they are unaware of the other levels of need(s) which are operating simultaneously -- the group maintenance level and the individual needs level.

Group Maintenance Level: As people work together in a group to perform a task, they are also doing something to and with one another. A group consists of a constantly shifting network of interactions and relationships. A group needs to have a growing awareness of itself as a group, and to face the need of maintaining the relationships within it if the tasks are to be accomplished. The maintenance level refers to what is happening between members and the whole group as the task is (or is not) accomplished.

Individual Needs Level: Every individual member of a group brings to it a particular set of needs which impacts upon the group and its task. It is at this level that we are most apt to be insensitive, for individual needs are frequently well hidden behind the task needs of the group, or behind well developed masks and social patterns.

As a group operates to balance these three levels of need; task, maintenance and individual, it becomes more effective and mature. When one or more of these levels is neglected, the efficiency of the group is impaired and its growth thwarted. (See Figure 1).

Figure 1 - The Balance Matrix

For a group to operate effectively at all three levels, a number of leadership functions must be performed by both the designated leader and the members of the group. Performance of these functions permits the group to satisfy the needs of its members, hold itself together as a group, and move toward its major objective(s). In a mature group, it doesn't make any difference who performs certain functions as long as all the necessary functions are performed well. However, in certain settings, the official position of the members and their personalities, will definitely influence the manner in which members perform.

Task Roles: (functions required in selecting and carrying out a group task)

1) Initiating Activity: proposing solutions, suggesting new ideas, new definitions of the problem or new organization of material.

2) Seeking Information: asking for clarification of suggestions, requesting new or additional information or facts.

3) Seeking Opinion(s): looking for an expression of feeling about something from the members, seeking clarification of values, suggestions, or ideas.

4) Giving Information: offering facts or generalizations, relating one's own experience to the group problem under discussion to illustrate important points.

5) Giving Opinions: stating an opinion or belief concerning an offered suggestion.

6) Elaborating: clarifying, giving examples or developing meaning, trying to envision how a proposed idea might work if adopted / adapted.

7) Coordinating: showing relationships among various ideas or suggestions, trying to pull ideas and suggestions together, trying to draw together activities of various subgroups or members.

8) Summarizing: pulling together related ideas or suggestions, restating the suggestions raised after the group has thoroughly discussed them.

Group Building and Maintenance Roles: (Important functions required in strengthening and maintaining group life and activities)

1) Encouraging: being friendly, warm and responsive to others; accepting others and their contributions, rewarding others by giving them an opportunity, a choice, or an important recognition.

2) Expressing Group Feeling(s): sensing feelings, moods, relationships within the group; sharing his / her own feeling or effects with / on other members.

3) Harmonizing: attempting to reconcile disagreements, reducing tensions, getting people to explore their differences.

4) Compromising -- when his / her own idea(s) or status is involved in a conflict, offering to compromise his / her own position, admitting errors, disciplining oneself to maintain group cohesion.

5) Gate -Keeping -- attempting to keep communication channels open, facilitating the participation of others, and suggesting procedures for sharing opportunities for discussing group problems.

6) Setting Standards -- expressing standards for group to achieve, applying standards in evaluating group functioning and production.

Both Group Tasks and Maintenance Roles:

1) Evaluating: submitting group decisions or accomplishments to / for comparison with group standards, measuring accomplishment against the goal(s) or objective(s) determined.

2. Diagnosing: determining the sources of difficulties, analyzing the main block(s) to the group's progress and suggesting the next appropriate steps be taken.

3) Testing for Consensus: tentatively asking for group opinions to order to find out whether the group is nearing consensus on a decision, sending up trial balloons to test group opinions / consensus / decision.

4) Mediating: harmonizing, resolving differences, involving differing points of view, reaching compromising solutions.

5) Relieving Tension: draining off some negative feelings through jesting or by "pouring oil on troubled waters", putting a tense situation into a wider context.

From time to time, perhaps more often than anyone likes to admit, people behave in dysfunctional or nonfunctional ways that do not really help and sometimes actually harm the group and the work / tasks it is trying to accomplish. Some of the more common types of nonfunctional behaviors found in groups are described below.

TYPES OF NONFUNCTIONAL BEHAVIOR:

Unlike the Task Functions which contribute to accomplishing the work of a group and the Maintenance Functions which contribute to the morale and cohesiveness of the group, the Individual Functions usually contribute to the

satisfaction of a personal need rather than to the benefit of the total group.

1) Aggression -- Not an overt act such as hitting or striking someone, but such things as deflating the status of others, expressing disapproval of the values or attitudes others hold, attacking the group of the problem it is working on, joking in a "barbed" way.

2) Blocking -- Impeding the movement of the group for personal reasons reflected by such behaviors as: disagreeing unreasonably, resisting stubbornly, repeatedly bringing up subjects the group has rejected or disposed of. Arguing too much on a point and rejecting ideas without consideration.

3) Dominating -- Trying to assert authority or superiority by manipulating the group or certain members of the group, controlling by means of flattery or other forms of patronizing behavior, and asserting a superior status and often interrupting the contributions of others.

4) Out - Of - Field Behavior -- Making a display of one's lack of involvement; the "I couldn't care less" performance. Various types of behavior which fall into this category and include:

   A) Recognition Seeker - constantly boasts about personal achievements, calls attention to one's self by loud or excessive talking, extreme ideas, or unusual behavior.

   B) The Self-Confessor -- uses group as captive audience, or as a sounding board to express personal, non-group oriented feelings.

   C) The Help Seeker -- elicits sympathy from the group, tries to induce members to be sympathetic to one's problems or misfortunes, deploring one's special situation to gain support.

   D) Competitor -- vying with others to produce the best idea, talk the most, and play the most roles to gain favor with the leader

5) Special Interest -- Using the group to promote extraneous interests, solicitations, and special self-interest projects; a lobbyist.

6) Horsing Around -- Always clowning, joking, mimicking, disrupting the the work of the group.

7) Withdrawal -- Acting indifferent , resorting to excessive formalities, daydreaming, whispering to others. wandering from the subject.

Note: In using classifications such as these, people need to guard against the tendency to blame a person (whether themselves or another) who falls into the "nonfunctional behavior". It is more useful to regard such behavior as a symptom and not a major illness and to conclude that all is not well with the group's ability to satisfy individual needs through group-centered activity. People need to be alert to the fact that each person is likely to interpret such behaviors differently. For example, what appears as "blocking" to one person may appear to another as a needed effort to "test the feasibility." What appears to be a nonfunctional behavior may not necessarily be so when the content and the group conditions are taken into account. There are times when some forms of aggressive behavior(s) in a group actually contributes positively by clearing the air and / or instilling new energy into the group.

How To Wreck A Group:

In a " tongue in cheek" presentation, D. M. Hall (1988) facetiously suggests eight ways in which a leader and members should <u>not</u> act or behave when participating in groups:

1) Never prepare in advance, speak spontaneously -- It keeps things on a superficial level.

2) Always take your responsibilities lightly. This reduces your anxiety level and increases the frustration levels of others.

3) Never try to understand the purposes of the group -- This guarantees you'll accomplish nothing.

4) Always do the lion's share of the talking. None of the others have good ideas anyway.

5) Never give credit, hog it all for yourself. The rest love a braggart.

6) Always speak of your many years of experience. This compensates for your lack of ability.

7) Never tell anyone how to do it else you may lose your prestige and position.

8) Always encourage the formation of cliques. The group can't last long when they begin to fight among themselves. (D.M. Hall, p. 22)

Improving Group Member Roles:

Any group is strengthened and enabled to work more effectively and efficiently when its members:

* Become more conscious of the role function(s) needed at any given time,
* Become more sensitive to, and aware of, the degree to which they can help meet the needs of the group through their actions and behaviors in groups.
* Undertake staff development and training to improve their range of role functions and their skills in performing them.

Stages of Group Development:

Group development is a dynamic process. Most groups are in a continual state of change. However, just because some groups, probably, never reasch complete stability doesn't mean that there isn't some general pattern that describes how most groups evolve. There is strong evidence that groups pass through a standard sequence of four major stages. These four stages are labeled as: 1) forming, 2) storming, 3) norming, and 4) performing. (See Figure 2.).

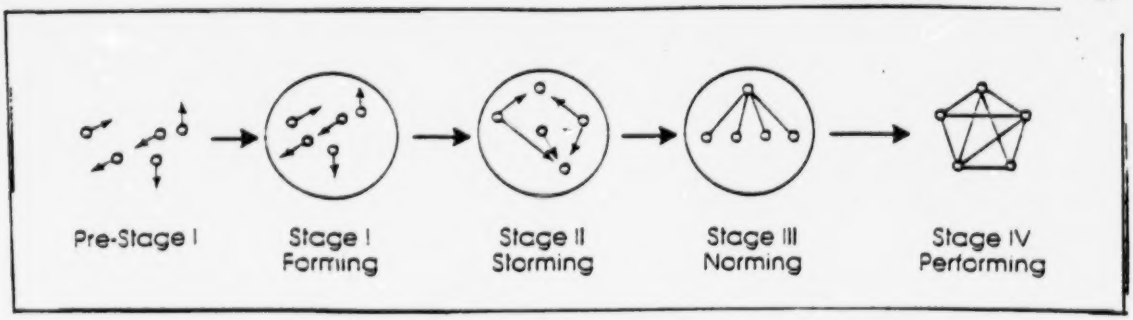

Figure 2. The Four Stages of Group Development

Forming – is characterized by a great deal of uncertainty about the group's purpose, structure, and leadership. Members are definitely "testing the waters" in anattempt to determine what types of group behavior are acceptable. This stage is complete when the members have begun to think of themselves as part of a group.

Storming – is a state of intragroup conflict. Members accept the existence of the group, but there is resistance to control that the group imposes on individual members. This state of conflict is compounded by tensions created over who will control the group. When this stage is completed, there will be a relatively clear hierarchy of leadership within the group.

Norming – is when close relationships develop and the group demonstrates cohesiveness. This stage instills a strong sense of group identity and camaraderie. This third stage, norming is complete when there is a continuing structure of the group and the group has assimilated a common set of expectations and standards over whatit defines as correct and appropriate member behavior.

Performing – is the final stage in group development. The structure at this point is fully functional and accepted. Group energy has moved, from getting to know and to understand each other, to the job of task performance.

Many of us have encountered these stages when we have entered new groups. There is usually a feeling out process used to assess what the group is going to do and how it is going to do it. This is sometimes followed by a battle for control: Who will lead us? Once this conflict is resolved and a hierarchy agreed upon, the group moves to identifying specific activities which need to be done, who is going to do them, and when they will be done, as dates are scheduled for task(s) completion. General expectations become set and agreed upon by each group member. Agreement and acceptance form the foundation of what will be a coordinated group effort culminating in a defined project or program that the members and the leader agree is a job well done. However, there are occasionally times that groups don't get much beyond the first or second stage. This frequently results in projects or program and efforts that are not completed and a great deal of individual frustration and group conflict results. While the Stages of Group Development are generally true, what makes a group effective is a still a complex issue. Under some conditions, high levels of conflict are very conducive to high group performance. Sometimes there are situations when groups stuck in Stage 2 (Storming) out perform those in Stage 3 (Norming) or Stage 4 (Performing). Similarly, movement through the stages is not always clear nor is it necessary or required. In fact, several stages maybe going on simultaneously -- as when groups are storming and performing at the same time. Groups occasionally even regress to previous stages. Therefore, to assume that the developmental process is followed precisely by all groups or that Stage 4 (Performing) is always the most preferable is likely to prove incorrect. It is better to think of the four stage model

as a general framework. Its construct reminds us that groups are dynamic entities and helps us to understand the problems and issues that are most likely to surface during a group's lifespan.

Marilyn MacKenzie (1989) in her "Creative Followership" article, describes an important and positive interaction which exists between the leader and the group members. She recommends that they should be open to new ideas and innovations and should not get stuck in the "We've always done it this way" mode. They should envision each new project as an opportunity, not a repeat of an old problem. She also mentions that members should be committed to working within the group. They should assume the responsibility of speaking out when items are being discussed, and to support decisions once they have been made.

MacKenzie describes this important interaction between the group leader and followers with the acronym: GRACE. The leader should use Guidance in gently pointing to the right direction and not smothering the group's role, function(s) or lifeforce. There should be Respect for each person as an individual with a critically thinking mind. Both the leaders and members should be held Accountable for mutual expectations of roles, standards of performing excellence, and appropriate behaviors. Followers must be allowed and encouraged to be Creative in groups.

Finally, Excellence should be the hallmark for followers. They need to be committed to providing quality time and effort, whenever, and howeve,r they participate in groups.

Van Ness and Murk (1988) provide fourteen timely suggestions for effective

group processing and productive meetings. They recommend:

1) Analyze who is necessary to attend the meeting -- invite no more and no less.

2) Understand clearly and hold the group accountable for the purposes of the meeting which exists: A) to collectively solve problems, B) arrive at group decisions, C) assign and coordinate tasks and D) clarify or answer questions about changes or develop new procedures.

3) Insist on a written agenda with an approximate timeline and objective(s) for each agenda item, (in advance, if feasible) and set an tentative number of minutes for discussion / resolution on each item. The time limitation may be extended by group consensus / agreement.

4) Clarify how decisions are to be made (by vote or consensus) and who will be recording decisions and assigning tasks. Divide all group activities into either maintenance or task items: analyze where the group's energy is being directed. (See previous section on group's roles and functions.)

5) Set accountability rules for the group. Emphasize that each person must assume responsibility for some task to move the group forward. He or she will be expected to answer for either the accomplishment or non-accomplishments of task(s).

6) Realize the while personal agendas are all right, as long as they do not negatively affect the group's main agenda; hidden agendas are destructive and result in manipulation, "game playing" and power plays.

7) Use a written task report sheet to track the group's progress (or lack of it): E.G. **Task(s) ---- Person(s) Responsible ---- Due Date ---- Status.** Assign tasks that are consistent with that person's skills, interests, time and experience.

8) Use clarifying and supportive statements or questions to facilitate the group's interaction or accomplishments. "We seem to be getting bogged discussion relate to the major issue at hand?" Therefore, it is important to call attention to the group's process as well as it's content.

9) Work to get conflicts into the open and discussed rationally. Use prompt questions such as: "Are there persons who disagree?" "Can you help me understand your viewpoint on this issue / question?" "Can we hear the reasons for both sides of the questions? Conflicts, if not expressed openly and left unresolved, often smolder and later explode. If a group "bogs down" or has serious conflicts, then bring in an outside facilitator or arbitrator to get the group renormed and functioning productively once again.

10) Cut off long winded speakers by indicating when he / she stops for a breath: "I believe we understand your point of view. Now then, what do the other group members think about . . . ?" or "Thank you, Mr. / Ms Speaker for that information. However, at this time we need to move on with the other agenda items."

11) Handle latecomers to the group or meetings by: A) Start the meeting on time, B) Have materials / agenda / minutes near the door for latecomers to collect or pick up, C) Acknowledge the latecomers presence without embarrassing them, D) Give a short summary of the group's major accomplishments thus far, and E) Talk with the habitual latecomers one-on-one after the meeting regarding tardiness and the importance of being on time.

12) Summarize all the major agreements and assignments made at the conclusion rather than waiting for "the minutes to be read" at the next meeting. Adjourn the meeting and then reconvene the meeting to approve the minutes -- it saves time and then adjourn the second meeting.

13) Take five minutes at the end of the group meeting to assess and evaluate what helped and what hindered the meeting -- both from the process and content viewpoints. This can be a very positive evaluative measure.

14) Finally, realize that democracy like group behavior is very effective, but rarely efficient. Group members must have legitimate and enough time to voice opinions, concerns over issues and preferences. The quality of the decisions made and feelings expressed of the participants must take precedence over the sheer speed of accomplishment.

(Van Ness & Murk, pp 7-8)

Small Group Facilitators Guidelines and Techniques:

Physically, it helps the group's dynamics if members form a circle (with their chairs) or be seated in a "horseshoe style" or a " U- shaped" arrangement to maximize the important "face-to-face contacts" and to provide more effective eye-contact between the group leader and the participants. This important group strategy is recommended so that the members can read each other's "body language" and actual facial expressions can be seen and understood. Furthermore, it facilitates good communication if the members know and respect each other. Therefore, a series of brief introductions might be in order that everyone knows "who", "what" (formal or informal organization they represent), and "why" they are participating in the group meeting.

Be certain that group members understand the purpose(s) for meeting together. A clear notion of what is to be accomplished is the foundation on which everything else rests. Not only should the leaders have a good idea of what he/she wants to accomplish, but , equally important, the suggestions of the group members should be solicited, which often become agenda items. This feedback helps to assure that the meeting will focus on issues relevant to the members. It also promotes anticipation, curiosity, and preparation. Further, the group members truly understand the task(s)or objective(s) and allow time for completing the assignment(s) and objective(s).

Doubling the preparation for a meeting can drastically reduce its length. The group manager / leader should carefully construct a written agenda based on each members' input on important issues. Their input should then be open for discussion at

the meeting. It helps if the agenda can be circulated far enough in advance of the group meeting to allow members to read it over carefully and to prepare any materials related to items for which they will be responsible. Establish an objective for each agenda item and allocate a tentative number of minutes for each item. If the group reaches the number of minutes allotted, the leader can than ask how the group wishes to proceed. The main item may then continue to be discussed, voted on immediately, or referred back to a committee for additional research. In any case, this system makes lengthy discussion of any topic a conscious choice and reduces the likelihood that the last few agenda items will be shortchanged, glossed over, or carried forward to another meeting. Often times, too many items are included in a given time span. A realistic objective is to discuss and agree on a few important issues adequately rather than trying to resolve a large number of issues in too brief period.

Clarify (if necessary) whether decisions are to be made by vote or consensus.

Allow no interruptions to the meeting itself, such as telephone calls, drop in visitors, or interrupters. Two exceptions to this rule are personal emergencies and important messages which will enhance the outcome(s) of the group meeting.

Appoint a recorder to summarize the main points of the discussion and to synthesize the major accomplishments at the end of the meeting. Some groups even appoint a timekeeper to ensure that the members stay focused on the issues and abide by the time periods indicated in the agenda.

If the discussion is difficult to get underway, direct a challenging question at the group or ask a question to an individual member and press for a response.

If one or two individuals seem to dominate the discussion, direct a thought-provoking question to them. Once you get them in private, tactfully ask for their cooperation and for their support.

Keep the group on task and on time. Remind them occasionally (or have the timekeeper do so) how much time is needed and how much time is left for them to complete their discussion on the issues or to work on their assignment(s).

When the discussion begins to drift, restate the specific point(s) under discussion and review the previous scenario and its major points in order get the group back on track.

Encourage quiet members to contribute and to participate.

If everyone tries to talk at once, suggest that they proceed in order around the circle and assure that everyone will have an appropriate amount of time to state his / her position on the question or issue at hand. This strategy can be repeated as often as necessary.

It is helpful for the leader or the appointed recorder to summarize midway through the meeting. Included in the summary should be the major points which have been settled, the specifics which have been accomplished, and the amount of time left before adjournment.

The recorder should also keep written record of the proceedings. The minutes should not be a recitation of points of view, but a succinct summary of all decisions arrived at during the meeting. The minutes should be sent to each participant as soon as practical following the adjournment. Decisions should be highlighted, and action(s)

taken by individuals circled, or emphasized with an asterisk.

It is important to remember to mention that the group leader should not do most of the talking in the group meeting. It is the leader's job to see that the group accomplishes its task(s) or objective(s), and not to accomplish the assignment(s) for the group.

Another helpful procedure is to take five minutes at the end of the meeting to assess what helped and what hindered both the group's process and content. To accomplish this, have a process observer or outside facilitator evaluate and critique the group's dynamics and progress following adjournment.

Finally, hold a stand-up informal meeting. Time will be shortened and accomplishments increased. Another positive suggestion is to have a telephone conference instead of a face-to-face meeting. Conference calls are efficient and save time as well as travel expenses. When using conference calls, always use an advanced organizer or faxed meeting agenda to keep the group focused and on track.

Conclusions And Adjournment:

With today's gadgetry and electronic wizardry, better communications are enhanced through cellular telephones, faxes, electronic mail, voice mail, and two-way television programs. Group meetings can be productive and effective through careful preparation, solid execution and administration, effective group dynamics, creative evaluation techniques, and through firm, yet humane, leadership and group management techniques.

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GROUP DYNAMICS ROLE-PLAY

The leader is told to help the class select a class color. Class members are each given a group role to play.

1. Role: Information seeker
   Position: Support blue.

2. Role: Tension-reliever
   Position: Introduce the idea of a different color--orange.

3. Role: Clarifier
   Position: Support Red

4. Role: None
   Position: None
   (You have the special knowledge that the group is going to be asked to select a chairman later in the exercise. You are to conduct yourself in such a manner that they will select you as chairman.)

5. Role: Gatekeeper
   Position: Against Red

6. Role: Initiator
   Position: Support Green

7. Role: Observer/Judge
   Position: None

8. Role: Follower
   Position: Against Red

9. Role: Information-giver
   Position: Against Blue

10. Role: Harmonizer
    Position: Against Green

11. Role: Coodinator
    Position: Support Blue

12. Role: Summarizer
    Position: Support Red

13. Role: Observer/Judge
    Position: None